

# THE SUN

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## Carolers draw attention to problem of disabled's access to shelter

By Robert Rogers  
Staff Writer

SAN BERNARDINO — They huddled Thursday morning at the doors of City Hall, clustered in wheelchairs and dressed in Christmas garb to plead in song for greater access to shelter for the less fortunate.

Mayor Pat Morris joined in singing "Deck the Halls" and other songs of Christmas before leading a dozen or so to the sixth-floor lobby of his wheel-

chair-accessible office. There he told them his greatest worry is what will become of the disabled or infirm if disaster strikes.

"The way we serve the most vulnerable among us is the true test of our strength as leaders in the community," Morris said.

The event was orchestrated by Rolling Start, a nonprofit advocacy group for people with disabilities, to raise awareness about what it says are twin problems: too

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Jimmy Grishom of Rialto joins others singing Christmas carols outside San Bernardino City Hall on Thursday. The event was organized to raise awareness of the problem of accessibility for disabled persons at homeless shelters.

Jennifer Cappuccio  
Staff Photographer

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few homeless shelters and their inaccessibility to the disabled.

Last month's passage of Proposition 1C authorizes the state to issue \$2.85 billion in bonds for a variety of housing and social services for the poor. As the money trickles to the local level, Rolling Start hopes to bring some dollars to improving accessibility for the disabled.

San Bernardino, which has the county's most visible homeless population, has few shelters and none that are adequately equipped to accommodate the disabled, said Julie Williams, a Rolling Start research analyst.

"We are here to put a face on the problem, to argue for more shelters and better, more-accessible facilities for what is all too often a voiceless segment of the population," she said.

Williams and others on hand Thursday were uniformly impressed with Morris, who spent nearly an hour singing and chatting with them.

While Morris did not make specific promises, after the meeting he vowed to make homelessness and abject poverty central pieces of his agenda next year.

"I have a number of concerns beyond the issues of crime and blight that have driven my policy over the last nine months," Morris said. "And I intend to drive forward on the issue of homelessness. We will move forward in a collaborative, regional way."

Homelessness has long been recognized as a glaring problem in San Bernardino



Jennifer Cappuccio/Staff Photographer

Members of Rolling Start, an advocacy group for disabled people, sing carols Thursday outside City Hall in San Bernardino to increase awareness of the lack of wheelchair accessibility at homeless shelters. In San Bernardino County, there are more than 23,500 reported homeless people.

County. A 2003 report by the Community Action Partnership found that as many as 23,549 people are relegated to life on the streets in a given year. The report stressed that the count is conservative, given the inherent difficulty in taking a census of people without addresses.

The Rev. David Kalke, whose Central City Lutheran Mission serves as the only homeless shelter for men in the city in the winter, said the problem of homelessness is

stubbornly persistent.

"We had 64 men sleeping on our floors and on church pews last night, and about 150 different people sleeping here in the last month, many with various disabilities," Kalke said. "The fact that disabled people come here for shelter at all is an indication of the depth of the problem."

Contact writer Robert Rogers at (909) 386-3855 or via e-mail at [robert.rogers@sbsun.com](mailto:robert.rogers@sbsun.com)